

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 339 770

UD 028 435

AUTHOR Garza, Elizabeth Pompa
TITLE The Impact of the State Four-Year-Old Program on Urban/Minority School Districts' Enrollment.
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 4p.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT IDRA Newsletter; v18 n4 p9-11 Apr 1991

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Disadvantaged Youth; *Early Intervention; *Enrollment; Limited English Speaking; Low Income Groups; Minority Groups; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education; Program Evaluation; School Districts; School District Size; *State Programs; *Urban Schools

IDENTIFIERS *Texas

ABSTRACT

This report presents an evaluation of a state implemented prekindergarten program for disadvantaged 4-year-old children in Texas in light of the program's impact on the largest urban school districts. The purpose of the program was to break the cycle of school failure and underachievement of disadvantaged and limited English proficient children. Its research-based rationale was that early intervention programs benefit low-income, disadvantaged children. Five years after implementation, the program has not been evaluated. However, using enrollment data, the impact on school density in 10 urban/minority school districts was measured. The results show a steady increase of enrollment in the prekindergarten programming in each district with the exception of one. Although total school district enrollment has increased, the prekindergarten enrollment increased faster than the total enrollment. This increase in overall enrollment continues the density and cultural isolation that characterizes the urban minority school. This and other unanswered questions about the schools' abilities to administer the program prevent an accurate assessment of the effectiveness of this initiative. Statistical data are provided in one table. Included are seven references. (JB)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *



The Impact of the State Four-Year-Old Program on Urban/Minority School Districts' Enrollment

by Elizabeth Pompa Garza, M.A.
Director of the IDRA Center for Literacy

Editor's Note: The goal of the State's Prekindergarten program is to alleviate school failure at an early stage. However, in the context of urban/minority schools this program could have negative, rather than positive benefits as a result of increasing the cultural isolation and density of urban/minority schools' enrollment.

Five years ago, the state implemented a prekindergarten program for disadvantaged four-year-old children. The purpose of the program was to break the cycle of school failure and underachievement of disadvantaged and limited-English-proficient children. However, in the establishment of the program the implications of operating such a program within the context of the traditional school setting were scarcely assessed. Additionally, five years later, the impact of the program on the original purpose – to alleviate the cycle of school failure – has not been assessed. This article addresses the rationale for early intervention, the impact of the prekindergarten program on the largest school districts in Texas, and unanticipated issues which are having an undesirable impact on the quality of the prekindergarten program.

Rationale

Early childhood education programs have attracted the

nation's educators as a means for addressing school failure, especially in urban school districts where large numbers of disadvantaged and minority students make up the school enrollment. Recent research on early childhood education programs indicates that early intervention benefits low-income, disadvantaged children (Council of Chief State School Officers Resource Center on Educational Equity, 1988).

In some school settings this may be seen as a panacea. However, the addition of programs for four-year-olds could serve to perpetuate the current concept of the urban/minority school by adding to the density and cultural isolation of the school's population, as evidenced in the 10 largest urban school districts in Texas (see table).

Recent trends in American demographics and the economy indicate that the number of children living in single-parent homes and in poverty is increasing. While at first glance this data may seem irrelevant to educators of urban/minority schools, numerous studies have shown that poverty correlates with lack of school achievement.

For example, the Committee for Economic Development (1987) found that students from low-income families have three

times the dropout rate as compared to students from high-income families. Additionally, schools with higher concentrations of low-income students have significantly higher dropout rates than schools with fewer low-income students.

Births to unmarried women increased by a factor of 6 from 1976 to 1986 (Council on Chief State School Officers Resource Center on Educational Equity, 1988). Additionally, the Grant Foundation's (1988) report on America's youth and young families predicted that by 1990, only 40% of children born in the United States would spend their entire childhood living with both parents. Children living in single-parent homes in 1985 were five times as likely to be poor as those living in other settings (Children's Defense Fund, 1987). According to the Committee for Economic Development's (1988) report on disadvantaged children, children from single-parent homes also evidence twice the dropout rate as compared to children from two-parent households.

Child poverty in the United States increased in the 1980s. The Children's Defense Fund (1988) reported that the number of children living below the federal poverty level is increasing. In 1979, the number of children living in

these conditions was less than 3.5 million. In 1985, the number of children who lived in families whose incomes were less than half the federal subsistence level increased to 5 million.

Research on disadvantaged and underachieving children, like those enrolled in urban/minority schools, indicate that the inclusion of programs for four-year-olds in these schools should alleviate school failure.

The growing body of research on the benefits of early intervention for disadvantaged and minority children and the propensity for school failure among this group were the same reasons that prompted the Texas State Legislature to include the creation of a state-funded prekindergarten program in their educa-

tion reform package in 1984. W. N. Kirby stated in the state guidelines (Texas Education Agency, 1986) for prekindergarten education that "... Drastic steps were needed to curb costly remediation and school failure in the later grades. The intent of the legislation is to break this debilitating cycle by building a solid foundation of school successes among four-year-olds" (p. iii). Thus the prekindergarten program in Texas was targeted to serve high-risk four-year-olds in the state. To be eligible for enrollment in a prekindergarten class, a student must be at least four years of age, unable to speak and comprehend the English language, or belong to a family whose income is below or at the poverty level according to the standards set by the

State Board of Education (Texas Education Agency, 1986). The program became effective during the 1985-86 school year.

The prekindergarten program was designed to impact the same type of students that make up the majority enrollment in urban/minority schools--disadvantaged and minority. Five years later, its effect on school failure has not been measured. However, the impact on school density in urban/minority school districts in Texas can be measured by tracking the enrollment in the program since its inception in the 1985-86 school year. To measure the consequences of the prekindergarten program in urban/minority school districts, enrollment in the program in the 10 largest school districts (Texas

**PreKindergarten Enrollments in the 10 Largest Texas School Districts and in the State
1984-85 through 1989-90**

School District	Houston ISD	Dallas ISD	Fort Worth ISD	El Paso ISD	Austin ISD	San Antonio ISD	Ysleta ISD	Northside ISD	Arlington ISD	Corpus Christi	STATE TOTAL
1984-85											
PreK	621	446	2,374	208	238	112	64	94	119	137	14,802
Total	187,772	134,288	69,086	3,604	61,067	62,003	48,246	41,029	39,262	39,619	3,170,070
%	.33	.33	.3	.32	.38	.18	.13	.22	.30	.34	.46
1985-86											
PreK	9,815	1,923	2,269	2,159	492	1,029	973	583	0	187	44,722
Total	204,050	137,823	69,768	65,655	62,542	62,966	49,690	44,501	41,450	40,087	3,275,671
%	4.8	1.3	3.2	3.2	.78	1.6	1.9	1.3	0	.46	1.3
1986-87											
PreK	9,455	2,817	2,287	2,412	1,477	1,883	1,088	671	168	187	62,401
Total	203,542	139,825	70,498	66,279	63,322	64,283	50,626	46,621	42,643	41,011	3,337,593
%	4.6	2	3.2	3.6	2.3	2.9	2.1	1.4	.39	.45	1.8
1987-88											
PreK	9,112	32,320	2,346	2,456	1,859	2,596	1,131	994	206	650	69,737
Total	200,611	139,568	70,855	66,841	63,613	64,341	51,617	48,607	43,390	41,844	3,366,194
%	4.5	2.3	3.3	3.6	2.9	4	2.1	2	4.7	1.5	2.0
1988-89											
PreK	8,886	3,897	2,355	2,584	2,114	2,807	1,291	1,239	252	927	77,060
Total	200,737	139,342	71,325	68,009	65,286	64,613	52,475	50,454	44,247	42,860	3,418,164
%	4.4	2.7	3.3	3.7	3.2	4.3	2.4	2.4	.56	2.1	2.2
1989-90											
PreK	8,738	4,401	2,359	2,659	2,167	2,917	1,360	1,165	312	1,041	81,18
Total	202,120	140,274	92,604	69,371	67,023	64,207	52,773	51,957	45,483	42,983	3,470,853
%	4.3	3.1	3.2	3.8	3.2	4.5	2.5	2.2	.68	2.4	2.3

Research League, 1990) in 1989-90 was tracked for the past five years using data from the annual superintendent's reports on enrollment to the Texas Education Agency for each of the 10 districts. The table shows the enrollment in the prekindergarten program, the total district enrollment, and the percentage of the total enrollment that the prekindergarten program comprises for each year the program has been in effect. Additionally, the table also shows the same data for the 1984-85 school year, the year before the state-funded prekindergarten program for at-risk four-year-olds was implemented.

The table indicates a steady increase of enrollment in the prekindergarten program in each of the 10 school districts, with the exception of the Houston Independent School District. (The Houston Independent School District has shown a slight decline in their prekindergarten program over the years, approximately five-tenths of a percentage point.) Total school district enrollment has also increased over the years. However, in eight of the school districts the percent of prekindergarten enrollment is increasing at a faster rate than the total district enrollment.

Unanticipated Outcomes

While a positive effect on school failure has yet to be documented, the prekindergarten program has impacted the urban/minority school district. The increase in overall school

enrollment and in the targeted population due to the state-funded prekindergarten program in Texas continues the density and cultural isolation that characterizes the urban/minority school. Cultural isolation has long been an issue in the desegregation of schools and raises questions about the effect on self-concept and the students' narrow view of the world. Studies on the positive effects of early childhood have generally been conducted in child development-oriented programs that are only for preschool-aged children and in facilities designed for early childhood programs like Head Start and day care. Additionally, many schools may not have the facilities designed for prekindergarten programs.

While increased enrollment may not be an issue, but rather an indication of a need for prekindergarten programs, there are a number of questions that must be resolved in order to determine the success of early childhood programs. How effective is early childhood education in the context of a public school system? How appropriate is it for the public schools to operate prekindergarten classes? How familiar are school district personnel with the purpose of early childhood education? Until we have the answers to these questions, we cannot accurately determine that the institution of early childhood programs in the public system is alleviating the school failure problem.◊

References

- Children's Defense Fund. (1987). *Childcare: The time is now*. Washington, D.D.: Children's Defense Fund.
- Children's Defense Fund. (1988). *A children's defense budget*. Washington, D.C.: Children's Defense Fund.
- Committee for Economic Development. (1987). *Children in need: Investment strategies for the educationally disadvantaged*. New York: Committee for Economic Development.
- Council of Chief State School Officers Resource Center on Educational Equity. (1988, December). A concern about... young children. *Concerns*, pp. 1-4.
- Texas Education Agency. (1986). *Priority '86: A guide for pre-kindergarten education*. Texas: Texas Education Agency.
- Texas Research League. (1990). *Bench marks: 1989-90 school district budgets in Texas*. Texas: Texas Research League.
- William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship. (1988). *The forgotten half: Pathways to success for America's youth and families*. Washington, D.C.: William T. Grant Foundation on Work, Family, and Citizenship.